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ABSTRACT

In an attempt to move the principles and technology of the therapeutic community into the college classroom, the author used mutual interviews and first-name group discussion among his students to build group rapport. Once group leaders were assigned, the students again used interviewing techniques to admit members to the groups. Other features of a therapeutic community such as goal setting, contract negotiation, and a token economy characterized this classroom setting. To create a sense of community and to conduct classroom activities, leaders attended staffmeetings, and students elected ombudsmen to represent them at these sessions. Seminars, quiz packets, and group projects constituted classroom activities. Generally favorable feedback from students led the author to feel the teaching concept was helpful. (LAA)

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THE THERAPEUTIC COMMUNITY TEACHING CONCEPT IN BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE EDUCATION

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The therapeutic community concept, born out of Alcoholics Anonymous, Synanon, Daytop Village and their dozens of offsprings now operating in every major city in the USA, has been hailed, despite the absence of hardnosed evaluative data, by the internationally renowned scientist and former president of the American Psychological Association, O. Hobart Mowrer, as the outstanding development known to man for achieving positive change in people.[1] And from a less exalted source, we garner this exchange:

PLAYBOY: Is there any religion you consider superior to any other?

KURT VONNEGUT, Jr.: Alcoholics Anonymous. Alcoholics Anonymous gives you an extended family that's very close to a blood brotherhood, because everyone has endured the same catastrophe. And one of the enchanting aspects of Alcoholics Anonymous is that many people join who aren't drunks, who pretend to be drunks because the social and spiritual benefits are so large. But they talk about real troubles,

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which aren't spoken about in church, as a rule. The halfway houses for people out of prisons, or for people recovering from drug habits, have the same problem: people hanging around who just want the companionship, the brotherhood or the sisterhood, who want the extended family.

PLAYBOY: Why?

VONNEGUT: It's a longing for community. This is a lonesome society that has been fragmented by the factory system... People don't live in communities permanently anymore. But they should. Communities are very comforting to human beings.[2]

The number of authorities ready to vouch that our society, and our educational system in particular, is beset by problems of failure, alienation, anomie, loneliness, is legion. Glasser explores this theme in his Schools Without Failure,[3] and in his more recent The Identity Society, he observes that we tell students: "Work hard for goals and then we will regard you," rather than, "We will get to know you first and then encourage you to work for goals."[4]

So it appears we have this situation: loneliness and anomie not only in society at large but particularly in the school system, and a possible solution -- the simulated extended family, the therapeutic community. What happens when we bring the problem and solution together?

For almost a decade, since our involvement in the founding of Daytop Village, the writer has been experimenting with moving the

principles and technology of the therapeutic community into the college classroom in behavioral science education. Over the years, different elements of Daytop have been added, withdrawn, revised to fit the university bed. About 1200 students have been exposed to various styles of the marriage of the Therapeutic Community Teaching Concept (TCTC for short) to the college classroom, and the version described in brief in this paper is the 1973 model as employed in a class of 50 students enrolled in an elective 5-credit course meeting 2 hours on Tuesday, one on Wednesday, 2 hours on Thursday, for a quarter session of about 10 weeks. The course is numbered CRM 407: Methods of Treatment in Corrections at the Florida State University Criminology Department.

Method

Getting to Know You

At precisely the scheduled starting time of the class, the instructor greets the students with a cheerful: "Good morning!" and waits for a response. If none is forthcoming, he repeats until the majority of the class gets the idea that a hearty echo is the desired reaction. He speaks about sociological concepts and findings about anomie and the desperate loneliness that appears to pervade all levels of our civilization. He wonders: Would it be advisable to attempt to overcome this disorder at least in the microcosm of our classroom? If so, how can we possibly do it? A spirited discussion cevelops leading to the conduct of two icebreaker experiences: a)

The mutual interviewing procedure, and b) The first name group discussion.

For the mutual interviews, the class numbers itself aloud from 1 to 50. The odd numbers line up against one wall, and the evens face them against another. The instructor explains that to the skillful interviewer, every human being can emerge as a unique and fascinating identity. The newspaper correspondent, the writer of profiles for the New Yorker; these people have developed the technique of extracting elements of history and background that make their subjects interesting. Let the odd numbered people in this class attempt to do the same with the even numbered students as their subjects. The interviewers ought to take notes because a few of them, perhaps five in all, will be called upon to introduce their "beautiful" subjects to the class as a whole. We have 15 minutes for this experiment. Get ready. Start! At the end of the interview period, a student is asked to call out an odd number from 1 to 50, and the student holding that number introduces his partner. The instructor writes both the name of the interviewer and the subject in large letters with colored chalk on the blackboard. The class is invited to question the interviewer and his subject for more data. After 5 students have been introduced, the procedure is reversed; interviewers become subjects, and more introductions are made to the entire assembled class. If there is an odd number of students in the class, the professor fills in.

The first name group experience follows comments by the instructor along these lines: A person's first name is frequently an interesting part of his identity. What is your first name? How did you get it? Do you like it? Have you changed it? We form into groups of five students sitting in circles in all parts of the classroom, and each person in turn tells his first name story. At the end of 30 minutes, we reassemble.

The Graduate Assistant

The graduate assistant plays a key role in the successful operation of the TCTC, and he is ceremoniously introduced at some point during the first class hour. The students are advised that the GA has been trained for his assignment, and he is prepared to counsel and advise students about any phase of this educational experience.

Goal Setting and Contract Negotiation

The class is asked: What do you want from me? What can I do for you? What do you wish to get out of this course? What do you want to learn? Go ahead, ask for what you want. It may actually be possible to provide it in this class. But you'll never know unless you assert yourself. Don't be bashful; speak your heart's desire. Etc. etc. After a long silence, some student mutters an ambiguous goal. The professor pounces on the reply with enthusiasm, rephrases the comment into a 4 or 5 word statement with the student's approval, and writes it on the blackboard as goal #1. Great! We surely can meet that goal ("Learn history of correctional treatment in USA"

perhaps), the instructor asks the GA. What else? Soon anywhere from 10 to 15 goals have been listed on the board. Usually, the students have not dared to venture out of the purely cognitive, intellectual frame of reference. The professor engages in a dialogue with the GA: "Do you think it's possible to reach these goals, John?"

"It won't be very difficult. They're rather conventional statements of educational aspirations. It's stuff you can get in almost any class. The students haven't really challenged the capabilities of the therapeutic community teaching approach. I believe we can do much more in this class than anybody has had the nerve to ask for thus far."

A deep hush falls on the classroom.

"What do you mean, John? Why don't you explain yourself."

John, who has been prepared for this exchange, tells about his own isolation and loneliness as an undergraduate, and his conviction at this point in the presentation of CRM 407 two years ago, that he had no right to expect an exciting, joyful, relevant learning experience. But TCTC makes it possible for students to stimulate their billions of moribund brain cells into action by thinking, solving problems, getting involved with one another. He knows that most undergraduates become increasingly cynical with each school quarter, but here in CRM 407 it can be different. We can act like a big family of brothers and sisters, really interested in learning and helping one another. "You can learn and actually enjoy it!" he concludes.

At this point, a number of students who have taken a TCTC course

before, usually raise their hands and offer testimonials of their experience. They speak of having acquired a better self-concept, more confidence in their intellectual ability and their capacity to deal with the problems of the world of work.

As soon as a lull occurs in the dialogue between students, the professor asks: "Please tell me, is this kind of terminal behavior to be accomplished solely on the basis of some mysterious and esoteric powers possessed by John and myself? Are you expecting some kind of strange miracle to be performed here in class? What is needed to get this delicious stew boiling? Speaking bluntly, what do you imagine you have to do to make this class an outstandingly productive and worthwhile educational experience. Let me list on this part of the blackboard (alongside the list of goals) what you have to say."

With the help of the GA and the graduates of other TCTC classes, the provisions of a contract emerge:

The student must to the best of his ability:

1. Attend classes regularly, absenting himself only for urgent reasons.
2. Read the prescribed assignments in accord with curriculum schedule.
3. Write, write, write, at least a page a day.
4. Practice being enthusiastic, friendly, responsibly concerned. Practice the concept of "Act as if" even when he does not actually feel these emotions.
5. Volunteer for oral reports and other class activity.

6. Cooperate with Group Coordinator (tutor-coach) outside classroom.
7. Participate in group and class discussions. Ask questions.
8. Challenge and confront sliding brothers and sisters of this class.
9. Wear nameplate at all class sessions.

A formal sounding contract has been prepared in advance with the above and other provisions organized into separately numbered paragraphs and the students are advised they can agree to any one commitment or all of them by initialing the statement. Or if they believe this contract is an infringement on their civil rights, they need not sign it at all. The assignment for the next session is to purchase texts for the course and to bring back the signed or unsigned contract. File cards are distributed for the student's name, knickname, campus address, telephone number, hometown, social security number, marital status, hobbies, special interests, professional goals. He is also asked if he wishes to volunteer to be one of the class group leaders we call Coordinators, using Daytop terminology.

Groups: Basic Matrix of the TCTC

Prior to the next session, the instructor meets with the GA, and six volunteers are selected to act as Group Coordinators. Their names are emblazoned across the length of the blackboard before class starts, and two chairs facing each other for interviewing purposes are positioned in front of the class under the name of the Coordinator.

The instructor greets the class and waits for a response. He

delivers a short lecture about the importance of groups in the operation of therapeutic communities like Daytop and Synanon and explains that group composition may be determined in various ways. In this class, the instructor and GA have selected six volunteers for the Group Coordinator position, and these people will now introduce themselves in alphabetical order. They will tell who they are and the kind of group they would like to form. Listen carefully to what they have to say because each student will soon apply for admission to one of the groups. Each coordinator will be able to select no more than 8 or 9 students for his group.

After the group leaders have introduced themselves, students line up to be interviewed for admission. The Group Coordinator usually uses the student's signed contract and file card as the basis for admission. Students who have been reluctant to sign many provisions of the contract, usually find out at this point that readiness for commitment is a prized characteristic for team membership.

The Group Coordinators usually call a meeting of their members that evening at somebody's home or in the student lounge or cafeteria. Thereafter, they meet every Thursday during the second part of the two hour session and at least once a week on the outside for periods of one to four hours.

Nameplate

All students receive a nameplate consisting of a folded 5x8 card. The student's first name is printed large enough so that a professor with fading eyesight can read it across a crowded classroom without

strain. The card also contains the student's second name, his hometown, and his group affiliation, A to F. The nameplate not only identifies the student but is the visible repository of the symbolic expression of the extent of his involvement in class business, as will be explained in the next portion of this paper. The inside of the folded nameplate contains a schedule of workpoints awarded for various types of class activity. The student keeps the nameplate attached to his clothes by a paperclip, and turns in the nameplate when he has earned some workpoints. He picks up his nameplate on the instructor's desk the next session. Monitoring nameplates is one of the GA's important responsibilities.

Token Economy and Grade Determination

Anxious students will be asking the instructor and badgering the GA with questions about "requirements" and grades. They are blandly assured that the grading system is as fair and objective as human ingenuity can devise, but will be explained to the class as a whole. For the time being, it is important to study the curriculum and keep up with the modest reading requirement of 15 or so pages of text per hourly session.

The token economy, the students are told, is a fancy term for what factory workers call piece-work salary. In this class, most of the educational activity of the student is promptly rewarded with a set number of workpoints. For example, every time the student sits in class for an hourly session, he earns a workpoint. If he appears for all the weekly sessions, he obtains 5 workpoints plus one bonus

point. If he maintains a 100% attendance record for the quarter, he is granted an extra 5 workpoint bonus. Whatever score he obtains in the midterm exam (Oh, yes, we believe in midterms, finals, group quizzes, take home exams. Research in educational methodology establishes that classes with feedback opportunities for the students obtains a higher rate of student activity, you know. Do you doubt it, the instructor asks the "humanist" student.) is part of his total number of workpoints. His final exam also constitutes a bulk workpoint addition to his total. Besides, the student can earn workpoints by a wild variety of activity: Presenting an oral or written report on a relevant TV program or movie, listening and reporting on a campus visiting lecturer, reporting on a popular or scholarly article, reporting on a visit to AA, a therapeutic community, prison, halfway house, research center, listening to our collection of reel to reel tapes in the university library, attending group sessions, working up an individual or group project. Students can realize large amounts of workpoints by becoming a Group Coordinator or an assistant called an Expeditor or a Ramrod. Roleplay demonstrations pay off, too. Volunteers are reinforced with workpoints.

In short, the university grade system is employed in the TCTC as a feature of reality, not choice. It is exploited creatively to teach a basic behavior modification technique, to intensify involvement in educational endeavors immediately, rather than waiting until intrinsic motivation takes hold. It is used as a reinforcement tool to reflect small but certain gradients of success.

Grading Schedule

The professor proposes that final grades will be determined according to the following schedule:

A -- 400 workpoints including a minimum grade of 75 in the final examination. (To preclude any slackening off on the part of students who may reach this total with several weeks of the course remaining. It is hard to believe the amount of student work the token economy system can generate.)

B -- 350 to 399 workpoints.

C -- 275 to 349 workpoints.

D -- 225 to 274 workpoints.

Workpoint Code

Visitors to the TCTC classroom are intrigued by the colorful appearance of the students' nameplates. "They look like an assembly of generals decked out in all their medals and service awards," a military observer once remarked. The effect is obtained by affixing a 1/4 inch self-sticking dot to the nameplate by the GA every time the student earns workpoints.

Staff Meetings

The instructor, GA, Group Coordinators and, with the passage of time, other class officers, meet for weekly one hour sessions to discuss class problems and progress. Strategies and procedures are devised to bolster lagging students,the level of class morale is judged. Suggestions are entertained to achieve our mutually agreed upon goals.

Ombudsman

At the end of the second week, candidates for the position of ombudsman (30 automatic workpoints) are solicited and a democratic election is held. The ombudsman is the student representative at staff meetings and is available to hear and act on all student grievances.

Seminar

Every class session (after the first few organizational ones) starts with a 10-15 minute period called the seminar devoted to a extemporaneous reaction to some slogan, proverb, poem, philosophical item. "No man is an island... John Donne, 1640." is the legend placed on the blackboard at an early meeting. "What does this statement mean to you? Who was John Donne? Do you agree with it? Do you have a personal anecdote you can relate to the seminar topic?" the volunteer seminar chairman asks, makes his own contribution, and then turns the podium over to a string of student volunteers who have 1-3 minutes each to express their ideas.

Quiz Packets for Examinations

A highly popular workpoint activity is constructing 5-item objective type questions based on each day's reading assignment. The best of the questions are selected for the midterm and final examination. Each envelope of 5 questions is awarded a workpoint. If a question appears in the midterm or final exam, a bonus workpoint is granted.

Projects

Groups are encouraged to present class projects based on the curriculum reading and course content. Workpoints are liberally awarded for creative and imaginative endeavors. Puppet shows, 8-mm color movies, roleplay demonstrations, slide illustrated presentations have been made by group members working as a team in TCTC classes.

Brothers and Sisters Learning Together

The seminar topics, the group sessions, "haircuts/pullups" (verbal reminders and reprimands), staff sessions, the cheerful, informal attitude, the ombudsman, group attendance at plays, movies, guest lectures, the token economy system -- all these elements of the TCTC are consciously designed to create a subculture that values mutual care and concern as a vital component of the educational process. The instructor and GA act as role models by repeatedly and unabashedly expressing ideas favorable to brotherhood, the greater prospects for self-fulfillment in an atmosphere of human regard and loving kindness within the college classroom, without sacrificing any worthwhile cognitive and intellectual educational standards.

Refining and Improving the TCTC

This paper presents in the barest skeletal form some idealogical and technological suggestions for introducing the concepts of AA, Synanon, Daytop Village into the college classroom. Much room exists for refinement and improvement on the part of instructors who may wish to experiment with the TCTC notion of meeting the demands of students for a role, not a goal, for personal identity and recognition, as

central element of their university experience.

Fortunately, almost every town in the nation now boasts an ongoing therapeutic community which can be studied for ideas and suggestions to improve our teaching model. Most of them welcome visitors from the academic community, whether students or faculty, and enthusiastically share their experiences, techniques, inspirations. A brainstorming session with TC residents and staff may yield an educational bonanza. Furthermore, the literature dealing with therapeutic community applications is growing, providing another repository of ideas and suggestions for the creative and pioneering university educator.[5]

Feedback and Evaluation

The instructor in a TCTC class can obtain useful data (and demonstrate involvement and concern) by the regular administration of anonymous questionnaires asking the student to grade and comment on aspects of the program. It will be noted that a miniscule minority will respond to all efforts in the direction of concern and involvement with scorn and suspicion. But the great majority, our experience suggests, welcome the friendliness and warmth of the TCTC class with pleasure and gratitude. The writer's SIRS (Student Instructional Rating System) report, derived from a comprehensive instrument which is analyzed by computer to obtain measures of per cent of student agreement with "1" indicating strong agreement and "5" strong disagreement, yielded the following favorable reaction to our spring quarter 1973 CRM 407 class:

Category	Items	Mean	Standard Deviation
Instructor Involvement	1-4	1.5	.71
Student Interest	5-8	1.8	.92
Student-Instructor Interaction	9-12	1.7	.85
Course Demands	13-16	3.4	1.24
Course Organization	17-20	2.0	.89

And one student scribbled (Bless his generous heart!): "This was my most valuable experience in four years of college education."

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2. "Playboy Interview: Kurt Vonnegut, Jr." Playboy, July, 1973. (Vol. 20, no. 7) P. 59.

3. William Glasser: Schools Without Failure. New York: Harper & Row, 1969.

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